

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 612

NATION
7 December 1985

■ THE MUZZLED DISSIDENT

No Free Speech At Radio Liberty

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Vadim Belotserkovsky is a Soviet dissident who left his country in 1972. In May, he became a dissident in the West, this time for protesting anti-democratic and anti-Semitic broadcasts by his employer, Radio Liberty (RL), the U.S. government-funded station based in Munich that beams Russian-language broadcasts to the Soviet Union. Belotserkovsky is fighting to regain his job. His case, which has received little attention in the American press, stands as a reproach to the Reagan Administration's anti-Communist crusade and the station's policies and political views.

Originally called the American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism, the station was established by State Department and Central Intelligence Agency officials in 1951. It began broadcasting to the Soviet Union two years later. (Its sister station, Radio Free Europe (RFE), started broadcasting to Eastern Europe the previous year.) Unlike the Voice of America, which is supposed to disseminate news and culture from an American perspective, Radio Liberty speaks from a Russian point of view.

In its thirty-four years the station has been shaken by fierce disputes among the émigrés it employs. Contrary to what most Americans think, Soviet émigrés hold a spectrum of views from left to far right, and the first staff, recruited covertly by the C.I.A., included people of various political persuasions. As Cord Meyer, who served as a C.I.A. overseer of Radio Liberty in the early days, wrote in his book *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the C.I.A.*, "Exile leaders were so divided among themselves on ideological lines, and the different political groups were so prone to infighting, that a tower of Babel would be erected if they were left to their own devices." Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act in the 1970s reveal that the staff included a large number of ultra-right-wing nationalists—people who dream of a non-Communist but no less powerful Russian state and who preach Russophilia and intolerance of "alien elements"—and even former collaborators with the Nazi occupation forces in the Soviet Union during World War II.

The current staff at Radio Liberty can be roughly divided into two factions. The first, which I will call the nationalists, consists of first- and second-wave émigrés, who left the Soviet Union between the Revolution and the end of World War II. Most of them identify with the Russian Orthodox

religious views and the intensely nationalist beliefs of the exiled writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The other faction represents the third émigré wave, the more than 250,000 who came to the West in the 1970s. Predominantly Jewish, most of them were born after the Revolution and were raised entirely as Soviet citizens. Although anti-Communist, they are more tolerant of liberal and even socialist values, and tend to sympathize with the Westernized political views of physicist Andrei Sakharov. Belotserkovsky belongs to this group.

In its early years, Radio Liberty served as a weapon in America's cold war arsenal. In the mid-1950s, its broadcasts denounced Communist governments from East Berlin to Moscow. It, and to a greater extent Radio Free Europe, played an inflammatory role during the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the latter broadcasting promises of Western aid.

Having been criticized for those broadcasts after the uprising, U.S. station officials informally imposed constraints that barred irresponsible statements. Nevertheless, polemics and strident anti-Communism continued to mark the broadcasts until 1971, when an even bigger scandal broke in the United States over revelations that the C.I.A. had secretly funded the two stations since 1950. Senator William Fulbright, then head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led the fight in Congress to shut down the stations as a "relic of the cold war." After a long struggle, a compromise was reached.

In 1973, Congress severed the C.I.A.'s tie to the stations and established a Board for International Broadcasting (B.I.B.) to fund and oversee them. Until 1982, however, a corporate board of directors continued to run the stations. The two boards battled constantly over policy, programming and financial matters. The Pell amendment dissolved the board of directors and reconstituted the B.I.B. into a bipartisan board with nine voting members (no more than five from one political party) appointed by the President. In effect, control of the stations' policy and operations is in the hands of Presidential appointees, especially the B.I.B.'s chair.

In Munich, RFE/RL Inc. is organized as a private corporation with 1,750 permanent employees and its own president, former New York Senator James Buckley. Each station has its own director, who is responsible for program content and personnel. Radio Liberty is the leading Western broadcaster to the Soviet Union. Every week its forty-six transmitters beam 400 hours of programming in twelve languages; Russian-language programs are on twenty-four hours a day. Americans hold most of the managerial posts at the station, and émigrés work as writers, announcers, editors, producers, technicians and the like.

Administrative controls are supposed to insure that broadcasts do not violate the B.I.B.'s 1973 statement setting forth the stations' mission and the guidelines adopted in 1976 by the B.I.B. in consultation with Congress. According to the mission statement, "RFE and RL are required by law

Continued

to operate in a manner not inconsistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States." In 1976, when détente prevailed, those instructions meant that program material should stress "an orderly process of evolution in the U.S.S.R. . . . toward domestic and international policies more conducive to international understanding." They also directed the stations to avoid "propagandistic argumentation, gratuitous value judgments [and] unsupported criticism of the Communist system."

The guidelines, which many émigrés—primarily those who came to the West in the second wave—saw as yet another corrupt aspect of détente, became the subject of a bitter struggle inside and outside Radio Liberty in the late 1970s. *Kontinent*, the most influential émigré political journal, published in Munich and closely associated with Solzhenitsyn's right-wing views, attacked them in a series of articles and editorials. According to *Kontinent*, they resulted in the "ruthless censorship of any slightly fresh word or courageous thought" and promoted "broadcasts of a frankly Marxist inclination."

They also touched off infighting at Munich headquarters. In December 1975 a group of employees calling themselves the Russian Nationalists posted a letter on the station bulletin board charging that Jews had seized control of the Russian-language service. In a meeting at the station a few months later, Victoria Semenova, a producer and nationalist activist angered by new guidelines issued by the B.I.B., stated that many broadcasts lacked a "Russian spirit" and that there was a "pro-Sovietism in the majority of our programs."

Many Jewish émigrés interpreted her charges as thinly veiled anti-Semitism. But when Vladimir Matusevitch, the Jewish managing editor of the Russian program service, retorted, "Our broadcasts are not for the Russian people but for the Soviet people . . . in the Russian language," the rightists said his words proved that the station had fallen into pro-Soviet hands. Semenova fired off letters to the station's president, members of Congress and the B.I.B. She was mildly reprimanded for publicizing internal disputes, but it was Matusevitch who lost his post. He was transferred to the London bureau, despite the protests of his predominantly Jewish supporters. In a recent telephone interview, Matusevitch said he had been a victim of the anti-Semitic sentiments of the station's influential nationalist faction.

There is some evidence to support his assertion. A few months after his transfer, in an open discussion with staff members of Radio Liberty, the well-known émigré Leonid Plyusch remarked that some Soviet officials believe that "Jews are the entropy of Europe." To the consternation of some of the other participants, a nationalist activist at the meeting openly agreed. Jewish staff members responded by publicly accusing the nationalists of anti-Semitism. Semenova and others shot back that the Jewish employees were inciting hatred of the "Russian nation." By late 1977, the acrimony was so intense that the Jewish staffers sued the nationalists for libel in a West German court. The suit was unsuccessful.

By 1980 the B.I.B. was alarmed by this negative publicity and the prospect of such disputes going out over the airwaves. In November it dispatched James Critchlow, the board's planning and research officer, to Munich to monitor broadcasts and examine scripts. In his report, which became a *cause célèbre*, Critchlow documented a number of "policy violations, [including] anti-democratic, anti-Western material." While finding no "overt evidence of anti-Semitism," Critchlow reported that "there were anti-Semitic overtones in some broadcasts" and that "a common thread running through the violations is the expression of Russian nationalistic and xenophobic views." He concluded that American officials had "lost control of RL's Russian output." In a recent interview, Critchlow said that the B.I.B. took quick action after receiving his report. At a board meeting in January 1981 it instructed the station's management to end the practices he had criticized and to tighten controls over religious and historical programming. But by that time, the Reagan Administration was settling into the White House, and leading members of the B.I.B. were soon on their way out.

The main qualification President Reagan's appointees to the board seem to have is their enthusiasm for the Administration's anti-Soviet crusade. Frank Shakespeare, who served as director from February 1982 until this past October, when he left to become Ambassador to Portugal, was an executive at RKO, director of the United States Information Agency under Richard Nixon, and former chair of the right-wing Heritage Foundation. Presumably, Shakespeare, who refused repeated requests for an interview, approved an influential Heritage Foundation memorandum titled "Mobilizing the Airwaves: The Challenge to the Voice of America and RFE/RL," which was published only a few months before his appointment. "With the pursuit of détente," the memo proclaimed, "the radios have been seriously underfunded. . . . In view of the potential these stations hold for American security and policy, it is important that this trend be reversed."

President Reagan has been a fierce advocate of an activist broadcasting program. His choice for director of the U.S. Information Agency, Charles Wick, launched an ideological purge at Voice of America. In July 1982, Reagan personally announced a long-range program for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty that "will make it easier for millions of people living under Communist rule to hear the truth about the struggle in the world . . . between the forces of totalitarianism and freedom." While the budgets of social programs were being slashed, the stations' budget increased from \$80.4 million in 1981 to \$125 million in fiscal year 1986.

Reagan's anti-Communist crusade soon had a major impact on Radio Liberty. In April 1982 the B.I.B. provoked an uproar in the politically volatile émigré community by appointing George Bailey as station director. (The position does not require Senate confirmation.) A onetime correspondent and executive editor of *The Reporter* and a

3

former European journalist for ABC News, Bailey, who is multilingual, had lived in West Germany since the early 1960s. As a civilian employee of the U.S. Army in postwar Germany, he interrogated displaced Soviet citizens and Red Army defectors and developed ties to the American intelligence community and to émigrés of the second wave. The New York Times and other publications have reported that he worked for the C.I.A.

Bailey's appointment raised two serious questions about the B.I.B.'s compliance with its own mission statement and guidelines. If the reports about his service in the C.I.A. are true, his appointment violated the 1973 legislation that severed the stations' ties to the agency. The choice of Bailey also contravened the spirit of the 1976 guidelines, which prohibit Radio Liberty from identifying "with any opposition group, political party or organization." Bailey had longstanding and well-known ties to *Kontinent*—which is funded by his personal friend Axel Springer, the right-wing West German publishing magnate—and to its editor, Vladimir Maksimov. Indeed, he was coordinating editor and de facto publisher of *Kontinent* from 1974, when it was founded, to 1982, and as such was deeply involved as a partisan in émigré politics. The journal had spearheaded the émigré campaign against the legislation and the guidelines.

Not surprisingly, Bailey quickly dismantled the mechanisms set up to insure adherence to the guidelines. A Congressional investigation this year found that he eliminated the pre-broadcast review of scripts, which had been conducted by the station management, and authorized politically sympathetic editors to monitor them in a way that, according to station officials, "favored the programs of friends while blocking those of foes." No less important, Bailey recruited his former *Kontinent* cohorts for leading positions at the station.

Bailey's policy, the investigation concluded, was "reminiscent of the fox guarding the henhouse." The result has been a series of highly controversial broadcasts. Since 1983, Radio Liberty programs have claimed, for example, that Jewish revolutionaries bear a direct responsibility for the destruction of the old regime, that anti-Semitic pogroms in the Ukraine during the Civil War should be understood in the context of Jewish support for the Bolsheviks and that Ukrainian Nazi collaborators were freedom fighters. Such broadcasts, which echo recent Soviet anti-Semitic propaganda, have been protested by Jews and non-Jews alike. Simon Wiesenthal, Harvard University Sovietologist Richard Pipes, the Anti-Defamation League and Senator Claiborne Pell, among others, have criticized the B.I.B.'s failure as an oversight agency.

But with Shakespeare at the helm, the B.I.B. was unwilling even to address the problem of broadcast violations until a barrage of critical reports in the press forced the issue last year. In fact, since 1982, the board's staff had repeatedly alerted B.I.B. members to the questionable broadcasts. James Buckley, who as president of RFE/RL was responsible for enforcing station guidelines, believed that nothing was amiss. In a recent telephone interview he asserted that

Bailey's loosening of controls has "produced much richer, more responsive broadcasting."

Buckley's outlook helps explain why Vadim Belotserkovsky's protests cost him his job last May, after twelve years at Radio Liberty. Described as a "first-class nuisance" by detractors and as a "crusader" by admirers, Belotserkovsky has always been an outspoken and uncompromising man. Despite a fairly successful career in the Soviet Union—he worked as a journalist on a number of newspapers and magazines, including *Izvestiia* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*—he was drawn, as a Jew and as a democratic socialist, into the human rights movement of the late 1960s. Unable to obtain work, Belotserkovsky left the Soviet Union in November 1972 in the wave of Jewish emigration.

Belotserkovsky's family name (he is the son of a famous Soviet playwright of the 1920s and 1930s) and his journalistic experience helped him obtain a job at Radio Liberty. He worked at the New York office until 1973, when he was transferred to Munich to write and coordinate a popular program titled "The Workers' Movement." Its themes reflected Belotserkovsky's longstanding interests. He believes that political and social change in the Soviet Union requires a mass workers' movement and has devoted his most recent book, *Self-Management* (published in the West), to the subject.

An active member of Radio Liberty's Sakharov wing since the 1970s, Belotserkovsky wrote a series of internal memorandums protesting what he perceived to be a right-wing *Kontinent* takeover of the station in the aftermath of Bailey's appointment. He also wrote a letter to President Reagan calling on him to "alter the situation at RL in the interest of the USA, of democracy and of Russia," and an article in an émigré newspaper attacking Bailey and the nationalists' growing influence at the station.

In 1984 a new outburst of anti-Semitic broadcasts outraged Belotserkovsky, particularly a program about Solzhenitsyn's latest novel, *August 1914*. As did the novel, the program portrayed heroes in czarist history, invariably ethnic Russians, as "the embodiment of the best national features," while characterizing villains, frequently Jews, as "cosmopolitans" (a Stalinist code word for Jews), with "nothing Russian either in [their] blood or [their] character."

Such broadcasts prompted Belotserkovsky to send a written protest to Buckley. When he received no reply, Belotserkovsky made his charges public in an article in *The Nation* [see "Undoing the West in the Soviet Union," March 16], which documented a number of antidemocratic and anti-Semitic statements in Radio Liberty broadcasts. His superiors demanded that he promise to refrain from making further public protests. When Belotserkovsky refused, he was fired for violating Section III-5B of the union contract, which prohibits station employees from pursuing any "journalistic activities . . . that adversely affect the legitimate interests of RFE/RL."

In a recent appeal to Congress and the B.I.B., leading members of the Soviet human rights movement in the West

4

declared that "any of us would append his signature" to Belotserkovsky's refusal to desist from further criticism of Radio Liberty. "It is for the right . . . to protest publicly in such circumstances that members of human rights movements . . . are fighting." For such protests, "people in those countries are also deprived of jobs and subjected to repression."

Many émigrés point out that other employees had been critical in public prior to the adoption of Section III-5B without even receiving a reprimand. Moreover, none of the employees responsible for the disputed broadcasts have been disciplined. Bailey was eased out as director at the end of March, but he remains a consultant to the station on full salary.

When B.I.B. chair Shakespeare arrived in Munich last April for a board meeting, he allegedly told Buckley, referring to Belotserkovsky, "Get rid of that S.O.B." Some radio officials think that Shakespeare wanted to get even with the in-house critics, and Belotserkovsky was an easy target. The spirit of intolerance appears to be spreading at station headquarters. Three of the employees who signed a letter to Buckley last May supporting Belotserkovsky were issued formal reprimands in October and may be fired.

Belotserkovsky is appealing his dismissal in a Munich labor court. The proceedings, which will resume next February, are expected to be lengthy, and his salary will be terminated on December 31. The father of a college student, he has no other means of support. One B.I.B. official thinks he has "a better than 50 percent chance." Whatever the outcome, it is hard to dispute Belotserkovsky's own bitter comment on the case: "There, in the U.S.S.R., I was without work because of anti-Semitism; and here, because I protest against anti-Semitism. Is there such a great difference?"

Belotserkovsky's case raises several important questions. Buckley's approval of questionable broadcasts at Radio Liberty makes his recent nomination to a Federal judgeship even more controversial. Then there are the larger questions of the objectives and content of U.S.-funded broadcasts to Communist countries. The latter issues involve not only Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty but also two newly created stations: Radio Martí, broadcasting to Cuba, and Radio Kabul, to Afghanistan. Even assuming that such stations play a legitimate role in promoting American values, the Reagan Administration's management of Radio Liberty dramatizes the danger that émigré-staffed stations may become fundamentally "un-American" in their ideology and broadcasts. □